

CTDOT Virtual Public Involvement Plan

January 2021

Public involvement requirements are being evaluated and modified as the Connecticut Department of Transportation (Department) works to combat the spread of the Coronavirus.

As of March 14, 2020, per Governor Lamont's Executive Order no.7B, *PROTECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RESPONSE – FURTHER SUSPENSION OR MODIFICATION OF STATUTES*, ("Governor's E.O. 7B") the requirement to make project documents available at public view locations/physical locations and the state requirement to hold in-person open meetings have been suspended.

Public meetings can be held remotely by conference call, videoconference or other technology, provided that: 1) the public has the ability to view or listen to each meeting or proceeding in real time, by telephone, video, or other technology; 2) any such meeting or proceeding is recorded or transcribed, and such recording or transcript shall be posted on the agency's website within seven (7) days of the meeting or proceeding, and made available within a reasonable time in the agency's office; 3) the required notice and agenda for each meeting or proceeding is posted on the agency's website and shall include information about how the meeting will be conducted and how the public can access it; 4) any materials relevant to matters on the agenda, including but not limited to materials related to specific applications, if applicable, shall be submitted to the agency a minimum of twenty four (24) hours prior and posted to the agency's website for public inspection prior to, during, and after the meeting, and any exhibits to be submitted by members of the public shall, to the extent feasible, also be submitted to the agency a minimum of twenty-four (24) hours prior to the meeting and posted to the agency's website for public inspection prior to, during, and after the meeting; and 5) all speakers taking part in any such meeting or proceeding shall clearly state their name and title, if applicable, before speaking on each occasion that they speak.

Below are the following procedures the Department will follow to ensure they meet the Governor's EO 7B as well as Department and FHWA/FTA requirements for Public Informational Meetings and Public Hearings required for projects receiving federal-aid. Projects requiring Scoping and Scoping meetings under the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) should be coordinated on an individual basis with the Department's Office of Environmental Planning until set procedures for such meetings can be established with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM).

Public Informational Meetings

Planning, Design, Construction, Survey, Right of Way, Maintenance, Public Transportation projects

For federal-aid projects requiring public involvement, all pertinent project documents are to be made available online for the public to access. For Department projects, officials will post to or link from the respective webpages.

Advertise the Public Informational Meeting

- Identify Title VI, Limited English Proficiency, and Environmental Justice Populations
- Publish two legal notices or advertisements in at least one newspaper of general circulation (https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/Permits_and_Licenses/newspaperspdf.pdf?la=en) to advertise the project informational meeting. The first posting should occur two weeks prior to the public informational meeting and the second posting should occur one week before the public informational meeting. If Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations have been identified within the project/service area, the meeting notice should be translated and published in non-English media (print, TV, radio, website, etc.).
- If the project is municipally administered, the notice must be on the municipality's website
- Mail/email notices, including translated versions, to key stakeholders, adjacent property owners, and community-based organizations found on the Department's website (<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOT/documents/ddbe/CommunityBasedOrganizationsListing09092015docx.docx?la=en>)
- Ensure project documents are available online (do not list any physical viewing location in your notice) on both the DOT's and the municipality's websites, if applicable.
- Contact the Department's Information Systems office to establish a webpage and dedicated project email address to receive comments if needed. Example of email address: DOT.PROJECTxxxx-xxxx@ct.gov. The webpage should be established prior to noticing the project and should be removed after the comment period has concluded.
- The required notice for each meeting or proceeding must be posted on the Department's calendar/websites and shall include information about how the meeting will be conducted and how the public can access the meeting and the pertinent project documents. Having the meeting on the Department's calendar automatically includes the meeting on the Secretary of the State's calendar. The meeting notice should state clearly that the meeting will be recorded.
- For certain municipally administered projects, the required notice and agenda for each meeting should be posted on the municipality's website and shall include information about how the meeting will be conducted and how the public can access the meeting and the pertinent project documents. Again, the meeting notice should clearly state that the meeting will be recorded.
- Your notice MUST include a statement that offers the public the opportunity to request project information be mailed to them. This is very important as we cannot assume everyone has

reliable internet service and/or access. The statement in your legal notice/advertisement should read “Persons with limited internet access or similar needs may request project information be mailed to them by contacting XXXXXX, Phone Number and Email address” (allow one week for processing and delivery).

- Your notice MUST include a statement that offers the public free language assistance. The notice should include contact information and procedures for requesting the services, including the deadline for requests. The following paragraph must be included in all public notices.

“Language assistance can be provided at no cost to the public and efforts will be made to respond to timely requests for assistance. Persons needing language assistance may request assistance by contacting the Department’s Language Assistance Line at (860) 594-2109. Requests should be made at least five (5) business days prior to the meeting. Individuals with limited internet access can listen to the meeting by calling [*Conference Call-in Phone*] and entering the Participant Code when prompted: xxxxxx.

Persons with hearing and/or speech disabilities may dial 711 for Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS). The MS Teams Live Event offers closed-captioning for the hearing impaired and non-English translation options. **The simultaneous YouTube broadcast will have English captions displayed.** A recording of the presentation will be posted to YouTube following the event and closed captioning (including non-English translation options) will be available at that time. Visit the project webpage for options for Apple users. During the Q&A session and the 14 day comment period that follows the meeting, individuals may leave a question or comment via email (preferred) at DOTProjectProjectNumber@ct.gov. Individuals may also leave a voicemail question or comment by calling (860) 944-1111. Please reference the project in your voicemail.

- Your notice MUST include instructions on how to access the project webpage. Also include information on the duration that the webpage will be available: Example:

“A project webpage is available which contains pertinent information about the project and contains a link to the upcoming Virtual Public Information Meeting (V-PIM) live streaming event. The webpage will remain available throughout the [14] day comment period following the meeting.”

- Your notice MUST include language on how individuals can access a recording of the VPIM. Example: “When the recording of the virtual public meeting is uploaded, you can find it in the list of DOT virtual public meetings here: <https://portal.ct.gov/dot/general/CTDOT-VPIM-Library>” On Municipally administered projects the town must also provide a similar location on their website.

- Project information to be mailed (upon request) should include project description, location plan, details on the comment period (length, start date), potential impacts to environmental resources and ROW, contact information, etc.
- Presentation materials pertinent to the meeting objectives shall be posted ONLINE via a project webpage on the Department website. The project webpage should include a project-specific

email address people can use for commenting during the comment period (14 day minimum), the start date of the comment period (the date of the Public Information Meeting), and the methods in which comments can be submitted. Every Public Information Meeting (or other open meeting conducted under the Governor's E.O. 7B) should begin with a statement advising everyone that the meeting is being recorded. When there is open Q&A following the presentation, the statement should be made again before the public comments begin.

- Under Title VI the Department is required to monitor the effectiveness of its public outreach to ensure that we are reaching historically underrepresented populations. CTDOT uses voluntary feedback surveys to meet this requirement. Before the public informational meeting, contact Tiffany Garcia in the Office of Contract Compliance (OCC) to request an electronic survey link. It is the project team's responsibility to contact OCC at the end of the comment period so that the survey can be closed and a link to the responses will be provided. The survey link should be posted on the project webpage, in the project presentation, and should be encouraged during the live event. A link should also be posted to the YouTube channel.

Holding a Public Information Meeting

Process

- CTDOT will be using TEAMS Live event
 - Include closed caption, translation function
 - Live streaming on Facebook, YouTube or other system
 - Suggest pre-recording the presentation by the design or project team, which is always in advance of the open Q&A. This will minimize possible technical issues.
- Town official may generally want to kick-off the meeting, so coordinate with the official on how to be included in the meeting.
- Address how public comments or questions will be handled live
- Prepare guidelines for the public to participate

Post Meeting Requirements & Documentation

- As detailed in the online presentation materials, the public should be offered a minimum of 14 calendar days (with additional days provided for more complex projects) to submit comments and the public comment period should begin on the date of the Public Informational Meeting.
- The Department shall consider all public comments in the decision-making process. The Department should review public comments to determine if a response is required.
- Project Manager or Lead Designer shall document the public outreach process on the attached checklist and keep this information as part of the project record.
- All virtual public meetings must be recorded and posted on the CTDOT website within 7 days of the meeting date at <https://portal.ct.gov/dot/general/CTDOT-VPIM-Library>.

Public Hearings

Planning, Design, Construction, Survey, Right of Way, Maintenance, Public Transportation projects, and Proposed Major Service and/or Fare Changes.

For federal-aid projects requiring public hearings, all pertinent project documents are to be made available online for the public to access. For Department projects, officials will post to or link from the respective webpages. Please note that the public hearing presentation must include the following topics (CFR 771.111):

- (A) The project's purpose, need, and consistency with the goals and objectives of any local urban planning,
- (B) The project's alternatives and major design features,
- (C) The social, economic, environmental, and other impacts of the project,
- (D) The relocation assistance program and the right-of-way acquisition process, and
- (E) The State highway agency's procedures for receiving both oral and written statements from the public;

Advertise the Public Hearing

- Identify Title VI, Limited English Proficient, and Environmental Justice Populations
- Publish two legal notices or advertisements in at least one newspaper of general circulation (https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/Permits_and_Licenses/newspaperspdf.pdf?la=en) to advertise the public hearing. The first posting should occur two weeks prior to the public hearing and the second posting should occur one week before the public hearing. If Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations have been identified within the project/service area, the meeting notice should be translated and published in non-English media (print, TV, radio, website, etc.).
- If the project is municipally administered, the notice must be on the municipality's website. Mail/email notices, including translated versions, to key stakeholders, adjacent property owners, and community-based organizations found on the Department's website (<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOT/documents/ddbe/CommunityBasedOrganizationsListing09092015docx.docx?la=en>)

- Ensure project documents are available online (do not list any physical viewing location in your notice) on both the DOT's and the municipality's websites, if applicable.
- Contact the Department's Information Systems office to establish a webpage and dedicated project email address to receive comments if needed. Example of email address: DOT.PROJECTxxxx-xxxx@ct.gov. The webpage should be established prior to noticing the project and should be removed after the comment period has concluded.
- The required notice for each public hearing or proceeding must be posted on the Department's calendar/websites and shall include information about how the hearing will be conducted and how the public can access the hearing and the pertinent project documents. Having the hearing listed on the Department's calendar automatically includes the hearing on the Secretary of the State's calendar. The hearing notice should state clearly that the hearing will be recorded.
- For certain municipally administered projects, the required notice and agenda for each hearing should be posted on the municipality's website and shall include information about how the hearing will be conducted and how the public can access the hearing and the pertinent project documents. Again, the hearing notice should clearly state that the hearing will be recorded.
- Your notice MUST include a statement that offers the public the opportunity to request project information be mailed to them. This is very important as we cannot assume everyone has reliable internet service and/or access. The statement in your legal notice/advertisement should read "Persons with limited internet access or similar needs may request project information be mailed to them by contacting XXXXXX, Phone Number and Email address". (allow one week for processing and delivery)
- Your notice MUST include a statement that offers the public free language assistance. The notice should include contact information and procedures for requesting the services, including the deadline for requests. The following paragraph must be included in all public notices.

"Language assistance can be provided at no cost to the public and efforts will be made to respond to timely requests for assistance. Persons needing language assistance may request assistance by contacting the Department's Language Assistance Line at (860) 594-2109. Requests should be made at least five (5) business days prior to the meeting. Individuals with limited internet access can listen to the meeting by calling [*Conference Call-in Phone*] and entering the Participant Code when prompted: xxxxxx.

Persons with hearing and/or speech disabilities may dial 711 for Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS). The MS Teams Live Event offers closed-captioning for the hearing impaired and non-English translation options. **The simultaneous YouTube broadcast will have English captions displayed.** A recording of the presentation will be posted to YouTube following the event and closed captioning (including non-English translation options) will be available at that time. Visit the project webpage for options for Apple users. During the Q&A session and the [XX] day comment period that follows the meeting, individuals may leave a question or comment via email (preferred) at

DOTProjectProjectNumber@ct.gov. Individuals may also leave a voicemail question or comment by calling (860) 944-1111. Please reference the project in your voicemail.

- Your notice MUST include instructions on how to access the project webpage. Also include information on the duration that the webpage will be available: Example:

“A project webpage is available which contains pertinent information about the project and contains a link to the upcoming Public Hearing live streaming event. The webpage will remain available throughout the XX day comment period following the meeting.”

- Your notice MUST include language on how individuals can access a recording of the Public Hearing. Example:

“When the recording of the public hearing is uploaded, you can find it on the Project webpage and archived in the list of DOT virtual public meetings/hearings

here: <https://portal.ct.gov/dot/general/CTDOT-VPIM-Library>” On Municipally administered projects the town must also provide a similar location on their website.

- Project information to be mailed (upon request) should include project description, location plan, details on the comment period (length, start date), potential impacts to environmental resources and ROW, contact information, etc.
- Presentation materials pertinent to the hearing objectives shall be posted ONLINE via a project webpage on the Department website. The project webpage should include a project-specific email address that people can use for commenting during the comment period (14 day minimum), the start date of the comment period (the date of the Public Hearing), and the methods in which comments can be submitted. Every Public Hearing (or other open meeting conducted under the Governor’s E.O. 7B) should begin with a statement advising everyone that the meeting is being recorded. When there is open Q&A following the presentation, the statement should be made again before the public comments begin.
- Under Title VI the Department is required to monitor the effectiveness of its public outreach to ensure that we are reaching historically underrepresented populations. CTDOT uses voluntary feedback surveys to meet this requirement. Before the public informational meeting, contact Tiffany Garcia in the Office of Contract Compliance (OCC) to request an electronic survey link. It is the project team’s responsibility to contact OCC at the end of the comment period so that the survey can be closed and a link to the responses will be provided. The survey link should be posted on the project webpage, in the project presentation, and should be encouraged during the live event. A link should also be posted to the YouTube channel.

Public Outreach and Receiving Comments for Proposed Major Service and/or Proposed Fare Changes:

When the Department is proposing major service and/or fare changes CTDOT will conduct a comprehensive community outreach process to provide the public with an opportunity to provide input, suggest alternatives, or request clarification on all proposed major service changes and/or proposed fare changes.

In addition to following the public hearing outreach requirements outlined above, interior notices announcing the virtual public hearings and the opportunity for public comment will be placed on board buses and at New Haven Line and Shore Line East rail stations.

To ensure the public participation process is inclusive, CTDOT will conduct targeted outreach to minority, low income, and limited English proficient populations. CTDOT will employ the following public engagement strategies:

- CTDOT will engage Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs): CTDOT will email the SAFE Analysis and a copy of the news release announcing the virtual public hearings to all identified CBO/FBOs in the impacted service area(s); or to all CBO/FBOs statewide for proposed fare changes. The email will request that the organizations share the information with their constituents and will provide contact information for requesting free language assistance.
- Community/Neighborhood Virtual Meetings: CTDOT recognizes the importance and effectiveness of meeting residents where they are. CTDOT will request to be added to agendas of established community and neighborhood virtual meetings to present the SAFE Analysis and advise the public on how they can submit comments.
- Social Media: Social media has become a cornerstone of effective communication. Facebook and Twitter will be used for announcing virtual public hearings and notifying the public of the public comment period. CTDOT will ask stakeholders, including community and faith-based organizations to share this information on their own social media platforms. The Department will keep in mind that this outreach tool is only reaching those with access to the internet.
- Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Safe Harbor Maps: The virtual public hearing notices are considered vital documents and the CTDOT will adhere to its Language Assistance Plan (LAP) to ensure that Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations within the impacted service area(s) are informed of the proposed major service and/or fare changes and can participate in community discussions. The Department will include information in the identified safe harbor languages in the targeted service area(s), on how to request free interpretation and translation services of documents describing the proposed changes and the SAFE analysis.

In addition to contacting the CBOs and FBOs the Department will provide this information to all Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs). During the two weeks leading up to the virtual public hearings, the Department will periodically send reminders and any updates to all CBOs, FBOs and RPOs.

Public Comments:

For proposed major service and/or fare changes, CTDOT will expand the methods for the public to submit comments. The public will be provided the opportunity to submit comments live during the virtual public hearing. Additionally, the Department will accept comments via postal mail, voicemail, text message, and drop boxes at major transit hubs.

CTDOT will review all comments and feedback received during the public comment period and make any necessary revisions to the proposed changes.

Holding a Public Hearing

Process

- CTDOT will be using TEAMS Live event
 - Include closed caption, translation function
 - Live streaming on Facebook, YouTube or other system
 - Suggest pre-recording the presentation by the design team, project team, which is always in advance of the open public comment period. This will minimize possible technical issues.
- Town official may generally want to kick-off the meeting, so coordinate with the official on how to be included in the meeting.
- Prepare guidelines for the public to participate
- How to handle public comment period – Still under investigation.
 - Establish time limit – example 3 minutes
 - Need mechanism in place to warn speaker at 2.5 minutes and mute the at the 3 minute mark
 - Establish a dedicated phone line
 - Public leaves a message and team calls them back when it is their turn to speak.
 - Public is on hold waiting their turn
 - Dedicated staff needed for these functions
 - Establish speaking list
 - List is on screen, so speakers know when it is their turn to speak
- How do we address last minute LEP requests - options under discussion

- Check maps and make sure appropriate individuals are available at meeting for translating
- Non English speaking individuals will speak in their native language and will be interpreted later
- Add the requested language to the closed captioning language options on MS Teams.

Post Meeting Requirements & Documentation

- As detailed in the online presentation materials, the public should be offered a minimum of 14 calendar days (with additional days provided for more complex projects) in which to submit comments and the period should begin on the date of the Public Hearing.
- Prepare a complete recorded transcript of the Public Hearing. Provide such transcript to FHWA/FTA including copies of all written statements from the public, both submitted at the public hearing or during the comment period after the public hearing, as required.
- The Department shall consider all public comments in the decision-making process. The Department should review public comments to determine if a response is required.
- Project Manager or Lead Designer shall document the public outreach process on the attached checklist and keep this information as part of the project record.
- All virtual public hearings must be recorded and posted on the CTDOT website within 7 days of the meeting date at <https://portal.ct.gov/dot/general/CTDOT-VPIM-Library>.